

Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel Hubbard Bell, June 12, 1898, with transcript

Journal written by Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel (Hubbard) Bell. Sunday night — at B. B. Hall, June 12, 1898.

First appearance of midges round my student's lamp.

Baddeck hidden from view at last by green leaves. The season has been very backward but the rain yesterday and to-day has brought out abundant foliage. The leaves on the birches were not fully out until yesterday — now everything is looking green and beautiful — that beautiful fresh green that only appears when leaves come out for the first time.

Two nights ago after leaving the Observatory I saw there was a large fire in or near Baddeck. We woke Miss McCurdy by telephone and she reported that the steamer May Queen was on fire. The May Queen has been anchored all the spring off Kitsen's Island near the lighthouse — abandoned. A purchaser was found for her and he was to have put in an appearance yesterday — but the fire has rendered his presence unnecessary. Boys have been camping out in her — and picnicing on board. It is supposed that through their carelessness she has been burned. Mr. Hoppin set out for the burning wreck and spent the night in pouring on water over the flames in order — as he said — to prevent the Island from catching fire.

Read the Article upon Liquid Air in the Cosmopolitan for June.

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Prof. Ramsey who had so much to do with the discovery of Argon and Helium is reported to have discovered and isolated, a new constituent of the atmosphere which he has

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named Crypton. It resembles Argon very greatly in its inertness and weight but possesses a distinct spectrum of its own.

I hear that the printing-press and type for the new newspaper have arrived and that the paper is to be named "The Baddeck Telephone."

It has been discovered that printer's ink exerts an influence upon a photograph plate — at a distance — through paste-board and hard rubber — analogous to the effect of the X-rays.

Gen. Montgomery Moore and Mrs. Moore have been in Baddeck for the past week. They came over here a week ago and drove over the mountain. They started to come over here to-day to talk Flying Machines and the Victorian Order of Nurses but had to turn back on account of the rain. Gen. Moore I understand is the Commander-in-Chief of all the British Forces in Canada. Mrs. Moore has been trying to stir up the people of Baddeck to the importance of having a trained nurse to help the people to nurse the sick in their own houses — and has actually herself provided a trained nurse for a short time to help Mrs. Gwillim. The nurse arrived from Halifax a day or two ago — and brought with her an air-bed for Mr. 3 Gwillim — which must have been a great comfort to him — as he is suffering from bed-sores. It is doubtful however whether he is sufficiently conscious to suffer much. He can hardly last much longer.

Gen. Montgomery Moore is to address a public meeting tomorrow at 1:30 p. m. on the subject of the work of the Victorian Order of Nurses — in Gertrude Hall — and to urge the people to try the experiment for one year — of supporting a trained nurse from Halifax. Miss McCurdy has taken the subject up and had notices read to-day in all the Churches. It will require the raising of four hundred dollars and the formation of a Committee to handle the matter. I propose to attend the meeting and to speak. I propose to offer upon your behalf, and in your name, that if the people of Baddeck will subscribe one-half the sum required — you will provide the balance — from yourself and friends. I have no doubt that

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Grace and your Mamma would help. I have no doubt that an important movement will be inaugurated — of great benefit to the country people here. The idea is good.

Hospitals are impracticable in county districts — and yet trained nurses are important to the recovery of the sick.

Instead of sending the patients to the nurses, send the nurses to the patients. This is practicable — and a 4 trained nurse can instruct the people at home and help them — telling them what to do and showing them how to do it — without the necessity of attending all the time to one patient alone herself. Her visits, I venture to say, will prove to be more helpful and more welcome than that of the physician himself.

By all means let the experiment be tried here. I feel so sure that you would like to help this movement — that I propose to give your name tomorrow, although I have had no opportunity of consulting you. Let the experiment begin now and then with your fertile brain and executive ability, you can mould the movement to your ideas when you come here. You may yet be able to carry out your private hospital idea through this means. Two or three trained nurses would be required for the County of Victoria — and there should be some philanthropic organization to sustain them and direct them. They should have a headquarters for the nurses, etc. If I remember rightly you had some idea that a cottage might be occupied somewhere as headquarters, and two or three patients received in it — in cases where removal from home would be advisable.

I don't remember exactly what your plans were — but I do remember that they struck me favorably.

Well we can make a beginning now and then you can 5 build upon it and carry out your own ideas.

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Do you want another society organized — The Baddeck Association to provide trained nurses for the sick — or Baddeck Association in aid of the sick? Develop your ideas upon the subject.

I have not yet met the promoters of the new Newspaper. I hope to do so tomorrow — and will suggest giving the Young Ladies' Club space for their proceedings and papers.

Lina McCurdy came over this afternoon and took dinner with us.

Mr. Atwater is here now and will stay all night — will occupy the Round Room.

Will look after your visitors list.

The importance of kite flying as a step to a practical flying machine grows upon me. The problems can be met successively. A flying machine must carry an engine of some sort and at least one man — but before it would be safe to send up either one or the other many conditions must be studied.

First and foremost is the question of equilibrium in free air. Certainly the equilibrium of a kite is a step — and a step that can be taken safely too. It wouldn't be safe to send up an expensive engine — only to tumble down and be smashed on account of proper equilibrium — and even with proper equilibrium an intelligence should be on board to guide it and meet emergencies — in fact the man is more important than the engine. A man could be sent up in a kite — if you had mastered the problem of equilibrium — so as to have a kite that should be perfectly steady at all times and not be liable to diving. It would be rather awkward — for the man — if his kite should suddenly send him head down to the earth!

The kite is not free however — it is anchored to the ground and the chief problem is the equilibrium in free air. Well, again the kite gives us a half-way position. It may be anchored to a float — a boat or other object floating in water. It then has the power of motion. No

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longer stationary at one point — it can move dragging its float behind it — and many problems could be solved by the man in the drifting kite.

The float or boat could contain a storage battery or a dynamo and steam-engine and send up power to electric motors on the kite — converting it into a tethered flying machine relieved of the weight of engine, boilers, etc.

Uses could now be found for a kite that could carry a man even though it had no propellers or engine or source of power other than the wind.

I will give you a few ideas on next page. Must reserve this for next time.

AGB.

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Dear Mabel:

If I can only deceive myself into the idea that I am not writing a letter perhaps you may get something out of me. This is not a letter but a Journal. Good idea to include memoranda concerning receipt of your letters in Journal items as suggested in your 2nd note of June 7th, received last night.

Received a pathetic letter from you yesterday, Saturday, June 11, inclosing A FILL ! with a pleading request to take it. "Please an you love me take it" are the words. What else could I do after that. I don't want any pill — I don't need any pill — but a pill that comes a thousand miles with such a request tagged on to it — must go down — if it kills me. So I wakened Mr. McCurdy at 3 o'clock A.M. that he might be a witness to the interesting operation. I showed him the pill — but he seemed doubtful as to whether it really was a pill or not. "It looks" — said he — "more like a *crushed fly* than anything else." However — fly or not — I swallowed it down — and I find myself still alive this morning! I wonder

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whether it really was a pill you sent — for I have not been able as yet to discover — any after effects.

Your note about my cousin Lewis distresses me. I haven't any idea what can be the matter with him. Your references are so mysterious to something very seriously the matter — as to suggest danger to life — and a hopeless case.

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I have not heard of his having been wounded or having a sun-stroke or anything like that — so that his illness or debility must have been of recent date. Hope Charlie will let me know something about it.

Don't know what makes you suppose that I have had "hard luck with my kites" — for it isn't so. On the contrary I believe I have made the most important step yet made in kite-flying (from its bearing or the flying machine problem).

1. Have found it to be the fact — that wing pieces arranged as above support — in whatever position they may be turned upon their axes.
2. The kite flies well — with the wing pieces perfectly loose on the axle stick.
3. When the wings of the loose wing pieces are tilted to one side so as to convert each wing piece into a windmill. The wing pieces rotate in the air while the kite continues to fly. It was a very interesting sight to see this kite flying with the wing pieces rotating in opposite directions. It looked like a living thing flapping its wings. The continued support of the kite during rotation of the wings I consider most important point foreshadowing wing propellers in a flying machine.

No letter yet received explaining the Key West and Cuba telegrams — but another long telegram about Key West received last night — from which I am glad to learn that the 9 Government Expedition you referred to has been still further delayed. If it is only delayed

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for a few days I expect you may hear of the appearance of yellow fever in the South — and then I hope you will be so satisfied that there would be risk in sending Daisy mouth at this season that you may be willing to give up the idea until a more appropriate time. The newspapers have already noted the appearance of the first cases of yellow fever in the South at McHenry, Mississippi. I should not be at all surprised to learn that yellow fever has already appeared at Key West — and that the cases have been quarantined and the news kept back by Press Censorship for fear of alarming the public about our soldiers.

Mr. McCurdy telegraphed Park Terrill that I could not go to Cleveland just now — but that I would be at Columbus at the Convention at the end of July and could then go to Cleveland.

Latest: P. S. It was not a crushed fly I swallowed last night! My goodness no! Oh! Oh!!
Your loving, AGB.